

REMARKS

Claims 1-20 are pending in the application after this amendment. In the following sections of the Amendment the rejections set forth by the Examiner in the November 17, 2004, Office action are addressed.

The Examiner has rejected claims 1-8 and 11-18 under 35 USC §103 as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 2,823,434 to Van Buren (the "Van Buren reference"), in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,327,619 to Ortega (the "Ortega reference"). The Examiner has rejected claims 9 and 10 under 35 USC §103 as being unpatentable over the Van Buren reference and the Ortega reference, and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 2,455,236 to Darvie et al. (the "Darvie reference"). These rejections are respectfully traversed, and detailed arguments are set forth below.

The Van Buren reference is directed to a fastening device that is very similar to the Alice clip shown in FIG. 1 and discussed on page 1, line 6 to page 3, line 11 of applicant's specification. The Van Buren device is described in column 1, line 55-column 2, line 25 as follows:

"The body portion 14 comprises a back portion 18, an outwardly extending portion 20 at one end, a slide stop member 22 extending from the other end, and a slide retaining arm 24 extending from the portion 20 in spaced relation to the back toward the slide stop 22 and terminating in spaced relationship thereto. The retaining arm 24 has an outer portion 26 extending to a bight portion 28 which is spaced from the stop member to form an entrance 30 to the space between the arm 24 and the back 18, and is then turned back alongside itself to terminate in a free end portion 32.

To receive the slide 16, an aperture 34 is provided in the bight portion 28 and an aperture 36 is provided in the outwardly extending portion 20 so that the slide 16 may be disposed between the arm portions

26 and 32 to be frictionally gripped thereby, yet is movable longitudinally therein to open and close the entrance 30.

* * * * *

The stop member 22 comprises an upper portion 46 having a slide receiving aperture 48 and a reversely bent portion 50 spaced below the aperture 48 so that the end of the slide, when in the closed position, is disposed in the aperture 48 to prevent lateral movement of the end of the slide.”

The Van Buren device slide 16 is guided by and slides through the arm portions 26 and 32. When the slide 16 is pulled back the entrance 30 is open and when the slide 16 is slid forward the entrance 30 is closed. For the arm portions 26 and 32 to work at all they must have at least some length. Additional structure (e.g. embossment 38, apertures 40 and 42, and camming surface 44) extend the length necessary to make the Van Buren arm portions 26 and 32 function. In the shown embodiment of the Van Buren device, the arm portions 26 and 32 are approximately 75% of the length of the back 18 so that the opening 30 is approximately 25% of the length of the back 18. The Van Buren reference does not appear to include true locking structure. Although the stop member 22, which the Examiner asserts is “locking means,” does include structure that prevents lateral (sideways) movement of the end of the slide, it does not appear to lock with the Van Buren slide as it would allow the end of the slide to open and close.

The basic requirements of a *prima facie* case of obviousness requires that there must be some suggestion or motivation, either in the references themselves or in knowledge generally available to one of ordinary skill in the art, to modify the reference or to combine reference teachings (MPEP 2143). The proposed modification, however, cannot render the prior art unsatisfactory for its intended purpose (MPEP 2143.01) and/or cannot change the principle of operation of a reference (MPEP 2143.01). There is no teaching or suggestion to combine the Van Buren structure with locking means such as those taught by the Ortega reference. There is no teaching or suggestion to combine the Van Buren structure with grooves and ribs (the Darvie reference does not

teach grooves and ridges and the structure it does teach is not longitudinal). Still further, making changes would render the Van Buren prior art unsatisfactory for its intended purpose and/or change the principle of operation of the Van Buren reference (for example, having the claimed insertion opening length being more than 60% of the main body length would mean that there would not be enough room for arm portions 26 and 32 to frictionally grip the slide 16 and/or for the embossment 38, apertures 40 and 42, and camming surface 44).

In the following paragraphs applicant has presented arguments to many of the claims. Applicant has chosen not to address the specific limitations of all the dependent claims at this time, but reserves the right to do so.

Independent claims 1, 11, and 17, specifically recite the limitation of "longitudinal slide track structure extending substantially between said first slide end and said second slide end." The following relevant text is provided in the original specification:

"Longitudinal slide track structure 80 preferably extends substantially between the first slide end 76 and the second slide end 78. In the shown embodiment the longitudinal slide track structure 80 is a plurality of ribs 82 (raised portions) and/or grooves 84 (lowered portions). It should be noted that what appears on one side of the slide track structure 80 as a rib 82 may appear on the other side of the slide track structure 80 as a groove 84. It should be noted that alternate embodiments could have a different form of longitudinal slide track structure 80. For example, a flat surface with a single longitudinal rib 82 or a single longitudinal groove could function as longitudinal slide track structure 80. It should also be noted that it is not necessary for the longitudinal slide track structure 80 to extend the entire distance between the first slide end 76 and the second slide end 78. In the shown embodiment, for example, the second slide end 78 does not include true longitudinal slide track structure 80."

The Examiner does not provide any guidance as to where he finds teaching for this limitation in the cited references and applicant is not aware of such a teaching. Further, as set forth above, the claimed "slide locking structure" is not taught or suggested by the Van Buren reference and there is no teaching or suggestion to combine the Van Buren structure with locking means such as those taught by the Ortega reference. For these and other reasons, applicant respectfully submits that these claims, and the claims dependent thereon, are allowable.

Claims 2, 3, 11, 12, and 18 include limitations directed to at least one secondary connection means. Although the Examiner seems to suggest that Ortega teaches the aperture-type secondary connection means in the main body, applicant is unclear as to which Ortega hole the Examiner is referring. The Ortega reference does include a hole 80 in the main body 10, however, this hole is the only means by which the Ortega connection means in this embodiment of the Ortega device. In claims such as claim 11, applicant clearly sets forth a primary and a secondary connection means. Further, as described in his original specification, applicant contemplates more than one connection means:

"The at least one secondary connection means 100 may be used to provide a secondary means of attachment either to the gear 52, to the base unit 54, or the gear and/or base unit attachment mechanism of the gear 52 and base unit 54 (the attachment mechanisms are not described separately, but are included in the gear 52 and base unit 54). This can be compared to using the connector 50 alone (in a manner similar to an Alice clip) to connect the gear 52 and the base unit 54 by enclosing both the gear 52 (or the gear attachment mechanism 53 shown as a strap) and the base unit 54 within the connector 50 as shown in FIG. 8. FIG. 9 shows the secondary means of attachment being used to attach the gear 52 to the connector 50 while the base unit 54 is enclosed within the connector 50. An example of this might be to use the secondary connection means 100 and the secondary connectors 102 to attach the sliding reusable

connector 50 to a knife sheath and then to use the main body 56 and slide 58 of the present invention to connect an attachment mechanism of the base unit 54 to the combined sliding reusable connector 50 and knife sheath. FIG. 10 shows the secondary means of attachment being used to attach the base unit 54 to the connector 50 while the gear 52 (or the gear attachment mechanism 53 shown as a strap) is enclosed within the connector 50. An example of this might be to use the secondary connection means 100 and the secondary connectors 102 to connect a plurality of sliding reusable connectors 50 to a base unit belt and then to use the main body 56 and slide 58 of the present invention to connect the desired gear 52 to the combined plurality of sliding reusable connectors 50."

As none of the references teach or suggest a secondary connection mechanism, applicant respectfully submits that these claims, and the claims dependent thereon, are allowable.

Claim 5 and new claim 19 specifically recite an open position in which said second slide end is relatively near said first main body end, an insertion opening defined between said main body locking portion and both said second slide end and said first main body end. When the Van Buren device is in its open position, its second slide end would be relatively near the bight portion 28. Accordingly, applicant respectfully submits that these claims, and the claims dependent thereon, are allowable.

Claim 6 and new claim 20 specifically recite that the longitudinal insertion opening length being more than 60% of said main body length. This limitation is discussed in the original specification as follows:

"A relatively large insertion opening is suitable for allowing a gear and/or base unit attachment mechanism to be positioned within and removed from the sliding reusable connector 50 without significant manipulation. This is a significant advantage over traditional Alice clips which have a relatively small opening that often requires that the gear and/or base unit

attachment mechanism be scrunched, pinched, or folded for insertion. It should be noted, however, that because traditional Alice clips do not have a true locking structure (in that they can easily open), the opening must be small so that gear 52 will not fall off easily when the Alice clip springs open."

The Van Buren reference specifies that the slide 16 is disposed between the arm portions 26 and 32 to be frictionally gripped thereby, yet is movable longitudinally therein to open and close the entrance 30 (column 2, lines 1-6). This structure is a crucial part of the principle of operation of the Van Buren reference and would require that the arm portions 26 and 32 have a significant length. The length is shown as being about 75% of the main body length, thus the opening is 25% of the main body length. Making the opening length more than 60% of the main body length would require a complete redesign of the Van Buren device that would probably change its principle of operation. The Examiner provides no reference that teaches an opening length being more than 60% of said main body length, but instead states that this is an obvious matter of design choice. Applicant respectfully disagrees and submits that these claims are allowable.

Claims 9 and 10 specify that the longitudinal slide track structure may be either "at least one groove" or "at least one rib." The Examiner cites the Darvie reference as teaching grooves and ribs. The cited structure, however, does not appear to be grooves or ribs. Further, the cited structure is not longitudinal. Still further, the cited structure clearly does not extend "substantially between said first slide end and said second slide end." None of the known references have any structure similar to the claimed longitudinal slide track structure. Since none of the references teach or suggest this claim limitation, applicant respectfully submits that these claims are allowable.

In view of the above, it is submitted that the currently pending claims are patentable. Accordingly, the Examiner is requested to reexamine the application, to allow the claims, and to pass the application on promptly to issue.

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Please charge Deposit Account No. 50-2115 for any additional fees that may be required.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Karen Oster", is written over a horizontal line.

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